

# How Familiar are You With Your Identity?

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**Abstract-** *A change in the attitude of the society is a prerequisite for bringing about any substantial change in the status of women in the society. Since the role of women is most important and no nation can afford to ignore it. It becomes imperative to look into the fact that how women identify themselves as feminist. The present study is a descriptive survey to measure the feminist identity among prospective teachers. The purposive random sample consisted of 100 female prospective teachers. The sample was categorized into two groups, i.e. entrant and proficient groups. The major findings of the study were that in both the entrant and proficient groups the art streams respondents scored the highest average feminist identity than the science group this could mean the subjects taught in arts gives more opportunity to students to learn about their identity in the social patriarchal system. It was also concluded that the art stream respondents may be at the 'embeddendness-emanation stage' where a woman immerses herself in cultural and intellectual contexts that are woman oriented. Unlike the science stream respondents, which may be transiting from the earlier stage 'passive acceptance stage' to 'embeddedness-emanation stage'.*

**Keywords:** Feminist, Identity, Embeddendness, Emanation, Prospective teachers

## **Introduction**

In the present era, women are the pivots around whom the society and whole community moves. Nearly half of the population is of women. She has the equal right to receive education, inherit and own property, participate in public and political life of the nation. Women have become economically independent, can seek employment anywhere and remain not a domestic slave. They work in almost all the fields such as law, medicine, engineering and teaching, they are also entering into administration and business management. Women are politicians, bureaucrats and even pilots. In the field of literature, science and social reforms, women frequently played their glorious roles by their contributions.

In spite of opportunities thrown open to her in various fields along with some labor saving gadget in house, she still seeks a place as an independent honorable human being contributing to the onward march of humanity. It is to be explored as yet that to what extent has the society accepted and approved the changed status of women. Cichocka et al. (2013) reported that women are being treated as commodities or semi-autonomous beings; while society continues to claim that they are equal to men. Many a time, legislation which is supposed to protect women employees, work against their interests. The constitutional laws that have been formulated and passed by our parliament with much fanfare have proved ineffective check the

crimes against women. Only making of laws is no solution, there implementation is must. Proper implementation of laws without first changing the basic values which are hindering it can be futile effort. A change in the attitude of the society is a prerequisite for bringing about any substantial change in the status of women. A woman in her entire life plays a variety of roles as a wife, sister, mother, friend etc. But what her actual identity as a human being is stills a question to be probed for.

Gender equality in any social order is an important socio-political and psychological matter of concern. The participation of women in socio-economic development of a nation besides her typical role in the home is gaining attention of policy makers and planners. As in the present scenario women are more aware of their rights, though they grow professionally and become more identity conscious but still maintenance of identity is difficult for them due to the prevailing Indian conditions of male domination.

While looking into the concept of feminist identity values and consulting the related literature it indicates the measurement of feminist identity, it as an evidence of an emerging area of research. There are only few studies in Indian setting. Since, the role of women is most important and no nation can afford to ignore it. It becomes imperative to look into the fact that how women identify themselves as feminist. And this paper will explore and give more insight into this emerging concept of Feminist identity with respect and certain demographic factors among prospective teachers.

### **Operational definitions of the terms**

Operational definitions have a special significance in research and a researcher cannot work with a variable unless he/she defines it operationally. Therefore, to avoid any kind of confusion regarding key terms namely feminist identity, demographic factors and prospective teachers are defined below:

**Demographic factors:** Socioeconomic characteristics of a population expressed statistically, such as age, sex, education level, income level, marital status, occupation, religion, birth rate, death rate, average size of a family, average age at marriage. A census is a collection of the demographic factors associated with every member of a population. In this study certain demographic variables such as, age, gender, educational level, socio economic status were considered.

**Prospective teachers:** Students pursuing Bachelor of Education programme which is of two years (four semesters) in Aligarh Muslim University.

**Feminist identity:** Thus the meaning of the whole term ‘feminist identity’ is- “to support the qualities of women and believe that woman should have the same political, social and economical rights as men.”

Feminism is a social and collective identity that is a complex intersection of political and personal ideologies (Bargand, 1991); People who identify as feminist share a sense of togetherness and community that accompanies a social movement, which “encompasses those who see gender as, a major category of analysis, who critique female disadvantage and who work to improve women’s situation” (Rupp and Taylor, 1999).

### **Research Questions**

1. Whether females who are aware of their identity achieve more in their academic subjects?
2. How far do females of different streams identify themselves as feminist?
3. Do female of different socio-economic status perceive feminist identity differently?
4. Does exposure to Gender studies contribute to feminist identification?

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives formulated for the study are:

1. To find out the relationship of feminist identity with academic achievement.
2. To find out the significant difference in the mean scores of feminist identity between entrant and proficient groups.
3. To find out the feminist identity grade of prospective teachers belonging to different streams.
4. To find out the feminist identity grade of perspective teachers belonging to different socio economic status.

Descriptive method of research was employed by the researcher for the present study, as descriptive method collects the detailed information from the participants and is concerned with the surveys.

### **Method**

Participants: The sample of the study consisted of 100 female prospective teachers of Department of Education. The sample was selected through purposive random sampling technique giving due representation to the subsamples based on gender and stream. The sample was purposive as it was decided to select the females pursuing B. Ed course and categorize them into two groups named as:-

- 1) **Entrant group:-** Those students who have not studied the subject like ‘Gender, school and society’
- 2) **Proficient group:** - Those students who have studied the subject ‘Gender, school and society’ in their 1Vth semester. The subject ‘Gender, school and society’ includes topics such as- concept of gender, gender and masculinity, equality, empowerment, role of a teacher as a social change, role of women in national development, recommendations of various commission and programs etc.

## **Procedure**

For the purpose of data collection, the researcher first questionnaire booklet was composed of 4 sections; the first section includes demographic information of respondents; the second, third and fourth section included the items related to the feminist identity. Then the researcher administered the tools to students of pursuing the course B. Ed (Bachelor of Education) of Aligarh Muslim University.

After contacting the students the investigator explained the objective and general instruction of the study to them. Lastly, the students were asked to read the statement carefully and give their responses to each and every statement. Doubts and confusions were made cleared by the researcher from time to time. Prior to taking the assessment, the students provided data on a few demographic questions related to them and their parents.

## **Instrument**

The tool used for the present study was “Feminist Identity Test” which was developed by S.K. Bawa and N. Sharma (2013). On the basis of different criteria to assess feminist identity, the main six dimensions of the test includes:-

### **1. Accepting stereo type roles**

The term stereotype derives from the Greek words “stereos” which means “firm, solid” and “typos” which means “impression”, hence “solid impression on one or more ideas/theory”. Thus, it means accepting stereo type roles is “to accept the role of any solid impression on one or more ideas/theory”.

### **2. Actively committing themselves to women’s role and social change**

The sense from “actively committing themselves to women’s role and social change” are those items which indicates the involvement into those activities which advocate women’s independence in role, belief and decision making and which activities bring social changes.

### **3. Revealing anger of guilt against oppression of women**

It means the root cause of anger and guilt is the violence or oppression of women.

### **4. Preference for socializing with women in relation to relationships and religion**

The act of giving preference for socializing with women related to their relationships and religion.

### **5. Acts describing feminist behavior**

Those acts which describe feminist behavior like supporting women empowerment etc.

### **6. Men’s role in feminist identity development**

In this dimension those items are involves which describes the men’s role in feminist identity development.

The positive items define the activities which advocate woman’s independence in role, belief and decision making whereas negative items describe the woman as snubbed, oppressed and

dependent. The item format is a ‘three-point scale’ i.e. agree, indifferent and disagree. The positive items are to be scored as 3,2,1 and negative items as 1,2,3 with the respective response. Test re-test method was used to determine reliability of the test. Reliability coefficient has been found to be 0.87 and its index is 0.93. When split half method was employed for determining its reliability, the coefficient of reliability has been found to be 0.67, and is index of reliability is 0.818.

### Result

Pearson product moment correlation is shown in table 4.1 where no statistical significant correlation was found between feminist identity and academic achievement among prospective teacher’s  $r(98) = 0.06, p = 0.951$ .

**Table-4.1** Correlation between feminist identity and academic achievement of prospective teachers

Variables	N	Mean	S.D	df	Coefficient of correlation	Result
Feminist identity	100	70.01	9.16	198	0.06	No correlation
Academic achievement	100	145.33	11.56			

T-tests were calculated between the groups. In Table 4.2, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied via Leven’s F-test,  $F(94) = 1.95, p=0.165$ . The independent sample t-test was associated with statistically significant effect,  $t(94) = 4.002, p= 0.000$ . Thus the proficient group were associated with a statistically significantly larger mean ( $M=149.33$ ) than the entrant group ( $M=140.30$ ).

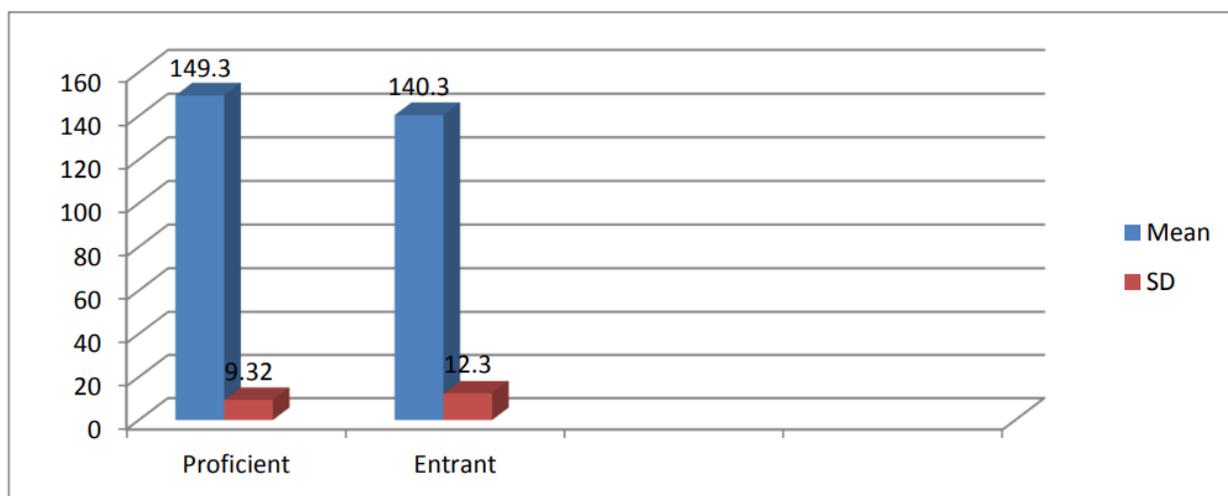
**Table – 4.2** Independent t-test between Proficient and Entrant groups

Group Statistics					
	GROUPS	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
FID	Proficient	54	149.3333	9.32637	1.26916
	Entrant	42	140.3095	12.76521	1.96971

### Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
FID	Equal variances assumed	1.955	.165	4.002	94	.000	9.02381	2.25484	4.54677	13.50085
	Equal variances not assumed			3.851	72.450	.000	9.02381	2.34319	4.35324	13.69438

The graphical representation of the result is shown in figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1** Mean and Standard Deviation of Proficient and Entrant Groups

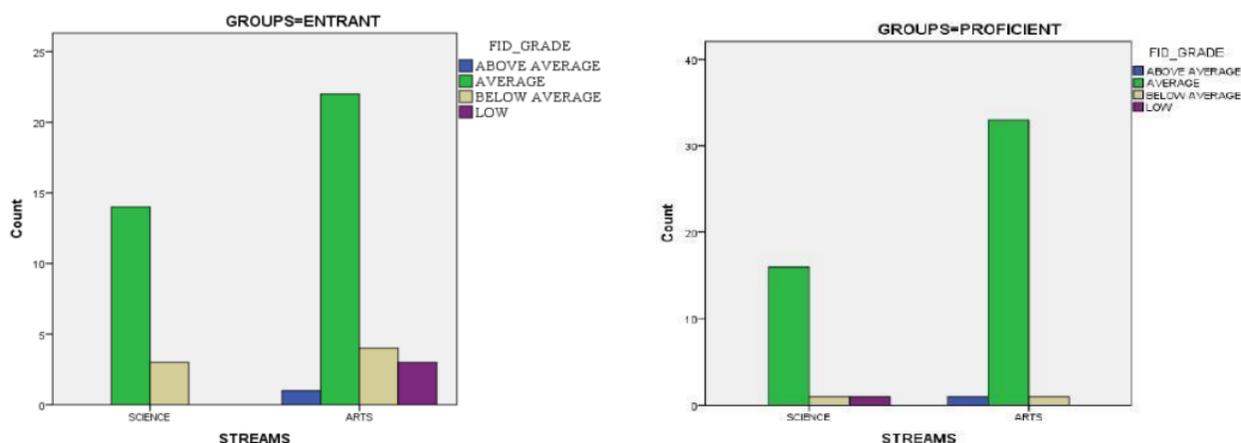
Percentage comparison was done by cross tabulation. It is evident through table 4.3 that around 82.4% of the prospective teachers in the science stream of the entrant group had average FID grades. No respondents belonging to science stream were above average or low FID grade. But a different scenario was perceived in the participants of the arts streams as 73.3% of prospective teachers had average FID grade, 3.3% had above average and 10% had low FID grade.

Whereas in the proficient group 88.9% of the prospective teachers in science stream had average FID grade there were also 5.6% respondents in the science which had low FID grade. In the arts stream of the proficient group 94.3% of prospective teachers had average FID grade, 2.9% had above average FID grade and no respondent in art stream had low FID grade.

**Table 4.3** Streams FID Grade Groups Cross Tabulation

Groups			FID Grade				Total
			Above Average	Average	Below Average	Low	
Entrant Group	Science	Count	0	14	3	0	17
		% within stream	0.0%	82.4%	17.6%	0.0%	100.0%
	Arts	Count	1	22	4	3	30
		% within Stream	3.3%	73.3%	13.3%	10.0%	100.0%
Proficient Group	Science	Count	0	16	1	1	18
		% within stream	0.0%	88.9%	5.6%	5.6%	100.0%
	Arts	Count	1	33	1	0	35
		% within stream	2.9%	94.3%	2.9%	0.0%	100.0%

The graphical representation of the two groups according to streams is given in figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2** Graphical representations of the two groups according to streams

Socio economic status was compared and tabulated in table 4.4, where in the entrant group high and low socio economic status respondents differed by 2% in average FID grade (i.e., High SES= 75% and low SES= 77.4%). The difference was seen in the low socio economic status of the entrant group which had 3.2% of the respondents with above average score and there were none of the participant scoring above average in high socio economic status. Moreover the high

socio economic status had 12.5% of the respondents with low FID grade which was more than the respondents in low socio economic status.

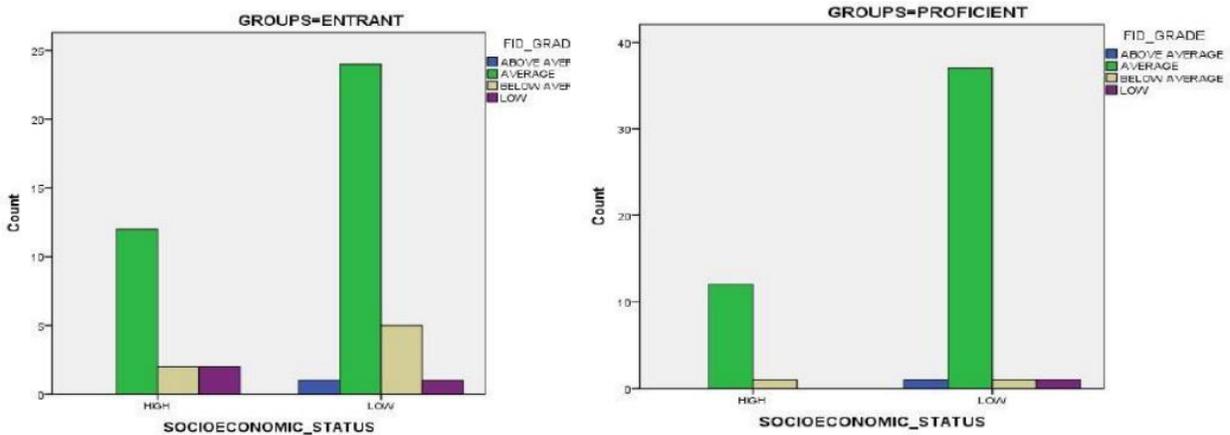
It was seen in the proficient group, high and low socio economic status prospective teacher had almost same average FID grade. (i.e., High SES= 92.0%, Low SES= 92.5%). Maximum respondents had average FID grades as in entrant group but proficient group also showed 2.5% of low socio economic status participating having above average FID grade. But there were none respondents with low FID grade in high socio economic status group unlike seen in low socio economic status.

**Table 4.4** Socio Economics Status FID Grade Groups Cross Tabulation

Groups				FID Grade				Total
				Above Average	Average	Below Average	Low	
Entrant Group	SES	High	Count	0	12	2	2	16
			% within stream	0.0%	75.0%	12.5%	12.5%	
	Low	Count	1	24	5	1	31	
		% within Stream	3.2%	77.4%	16.1%	3.2%		
Proficient Group	SES	High	Count	0	12	1	0	13
			% within stream	0.0%	92.0%	5.6%	0.0%	
	Low	Count	1	37	1	1	40	
		% within stream	2.5%	92.5%	2.5%	2.5%		

The graphical representation of the two groups according to socio economic status is given in figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3** Graphical representations of the two groups according to socio economic status



A number of scholars have postulated that holding feminist attitude might be helpful to women, given the current context of a sexist environment perhaps by assisting women to name their experiences and direct blame away from themselves (Fingeret and Gleaves, 2004; Sabik and Tylka, 2006). In fact, Moradi and Subich (2002) found that the relation between experiencing sexist events and psychological distress was stronger for women low in feminist attitude.

In both the entrant and proficient groups the art streams respondents scored the highest average feminist identity than the science group this could mean the subjects taught in arts gives more opportunity to students to learn about their identity in the social patriarchal system. According to Yakushko (2007) women with moderate or strong feminist values had higher levels of well beings than those with traditional values.

We can also conclude from this finding that the art stream respondents may be at the 'embeddendness -emanation stage, given by Dowling and Roush (1985) where a woman immerses herself in cultural and intellectual contexts that are woman oriented. Unlike the science stream respondents, which may be transiting from the earlier stage 'passive acceptance stage' to 'embeddedness–emanation stage'. Moreover the emphasis laid down by Erchull et. al (2009) study places on the distinction between holding feminist attitudes and having a feminist identity is found on evidence that attitudes do not necessarily translate into identity.

Those respondents who might not identify themselves as feminist may be termed as 'non-labelers'. These non-labelers endorse the belief that women and men should be paid equally for the same work, they do so not because they are interested in contesting gender bias and advocating for women's rights (as in the feminists) per-se, but because they do believe in individuals entitlement to opportunities to compete and fair rewards if they prevail. The proficient and the entrant group of the science stream may be also termed as 'quasi-feminist' on a continuum of feminist identity.

In both the entrant and proficient group the low socio-economic status respondents showed remarkable results like they were the only ones scoring above average FID. The findings are contrasting to the studies done in rural and urban locality where SES was considered as an important aspect (McCabe, 2005). Community size was found as a significant predictor of feminist self-identity. Individuals living in rural areas or medium sized communities living in rural areas or medium sized communities are significantly less likely to self-identify a feminist than are those residing in urban areas. But in this study respondents belonging to low SES are more likely to self-identify as 'feminists' because of the kind of treatment they are receiving at home, workplace and in their locality. Deprivation of facilities and opportunities due to their SES make the respondents more aware of their identity and how to elevate or improve their status by being aware of the present situation prevailing their society and also how to fight these stereotype dominated notions in their society.

This could be better understood by the study of (Kane 2000; Hunter and Seller 1998) in which they found a significant direction of relationship between race and feminist identify. Middle class or low class was found in the color population. It suggested that people of color's consciousness for racial inequality predisposes them towards other movement for equality, such as feminism.

### **Educational Implications**

The findings of the present study may have the following educational implications:

1. Conscious identify may be a key element that helps translate individual level experiences and characteristics into collective behavior and contributes to the importance of adopting the identity to understood activism, rightly said by Duncan (1999).
2. Connecting to history is important. Anecdotal evidence suggests that individuals, particular young women, do not see the feminist movement as relevant to their lives and therefore do not see the need to self-identify with term. All of these factors may have differential impacts on women's and men's willingness to self-label as feminists. (Ramsey et. al 2007).
3. The word "Feminist" needs more clarification especially in sciences and social sciences subjects. Because women and men differ in how self-identification and beliefs about specific explanations for gender inequality are linked.
4. How media is distorting the term 'feminist' and is instilling the notion related to feminist must be clarified through introduction of proper and correct content matter in textbooks.
5. Urban communities offer increased opportunities for non-traditional experience and lifestyle than smaller communities. Encouraging female to receive education in urban locality will definitely prove to enhance their concept and awareness as feminist and they will have something important to take back home. That is the whole 'evolved feminist' personality.
6. The course 'Gender, school and society' taught in department of education has helped, the prospective teachers to develop their 'feminist identity'. Likewise similar content in short duration course would be taught in different faculties especially sciences.
7. Researchers have found that exposure to positive information about feminism – whether through formal education or personal relationships – is predictive of explicit self-identification.
8. Women students should be encouraged to reach higher levels of self- understanding and personal acceptance. Therefore, students' affairs professionals must first receive proper training on how to interpret women identity theory and learn how best to use the overall theoretical framework in program planning and evaluation efforts. Such students' affairs professionals are aware of their own attitudes and feeling toward racial and cultural groups; and they have acquired a variety of culturally diverse students.

9. An approach to develop a better connection to feminism that may be useful is to develop a gender – specific counseling service that speaks directly to issues facing women students on campus.
10. This study suggests that institutions must begin to develop assessments procedure that focus directly on women students on campus.

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